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EARLY WATERFOWL FORECAST: NESTING CONDITIONS IMPROVE; BREEDING POPULATION UNCHANGED

June conditions on North America's primary nesting areas showed a slight improvement over 1966, but the number of breeding birds is relatively unchanged from last year, the Department of the Interior reports.

Early reports from flyway biologists of the Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife indicate practically no change in the mallard breeding population, a 17-percent increase in nesting pintails, a decrease of 9 percent for blue-winged teal, a 7-percent decrease for redhead ducks, and a drop of 20 percent for the canvasback. But these are only the first reports, the Bureau said.

Water conditions, synonymous with duck nesting habitat, showed a slight improvement in southern Canada. Water in eastern Montana and the tri-State area (Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota) was up 15 percent. Added to a favorable carry over of water from 1966, this general improvement throughout most of North America's prime duck raising habitat spells good brood conditions for 1967.

Reports are not in from biologists who annually fly survey routes in eastern Canada (nesting area for the popular black duck), Alaska, and the northern areas of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. However, contributions from these areas are not expected to make a significant change in the mallard picture, said Sport Fisheries and Wildlife Director John Gottschalk.

"A late spring delayed both the nesting season and the aerial surveys by about two weeks," Gottschalk said. "One of our flyway biologists reported many forest fires in southern Ontario, while water areas farther north were still frozen."

Two statistically designed aerial surveys of the primary duck nesting grounds are conducted annually by Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. The spring survey measures changes in the size of the breeding population and checks on water levels and other conditions that affect nesting. In July, the aerial transects are again flown to determine summer water conditions and the production of young ducks. Fall duck hunting regulations are based on these surveys plus information obtained from band returns, mail hunter questionnaires and duck wings sent in by hunters.

Nine airplanes are used inthe surveys. Light planes cover the prairie country, while long-range amphibious bush planes are used for the northern wilderness areas of Canada and Alaska.

"We will report throughout the summer on waterfowl conditions as significant information comes in from our field biologists and the Canadian Wildlife Service," Gottschalk said.

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